

Toothpaste: The Misunderstood Epicurean Delight

by Tina Caputo

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You put it in your mouth at least twice a day.

You swish. You swirl. You spit. But are you really approaching the experience with the proper reverence? Do you sniff the cap after you take it off? Do you inhale the minty aromas as they waft from the tube? Do you appreciate the foamy texture and subtle flavors as they glide across your tongue? Or do you think of it as merely... toothpaste?

Tragically, most Americans overlook the sensual pleasures of brushing their teeth. Some, I dare say, even think of it as a chore! Well, gentle readers, you don't have to think that way anymore!

Toothpaste tasting, like wine tasting, can be broken down into a few simple steps that even your idiot cousin Larry could follow:

1) Admire the Tube

Take a moment to appreciate the aesthetics of the tube prior to squeezing. Do the colors please you? Is the tube skinny or fat? Caress the tube. Is it smooth or textured?

2) Remove and Sniff the Cap

Always be sure to sniff the toothpaste cap to see that the product is fresh. If the tube is "capped" you may not be getting all the flavor and fluoride protection your \$2.69 commands. If you find that your toothpaste has off odors or colors, don't be afraid to send it back.

3) Squeeze onto Brush and Note Color

Unlike the mundane years when toothpaste only came in white, today's products come in an exciting rainbow of colors! Does your toothpaste sparkle? Is it striped? Does it glow in the dark? Is it opaque or transparent? Is it electric blue, pale green or fire engine red?

4) Inhale

Before brushing, be sure to drink in the heady aromas of the paste as it rests on your toothbrush. Look beyond simple mintiness and ask yourself: does it smell of fresh spearmint or artificial? Pep-o-Mint Lifesavers or Altoids?

5) Brush

This is the moment the true toothpaste connoisseur awaits in breathless anticipation: the explosive consummation of brush, paste, water and teeth! Don't just brush: swish, swirl and gargle the paste in your mouth! Note the texture: is it foamy? Gritty? Smooth? Do the flavors match the aromas of the toothpaste? Is it well-balanced? Does it make you want to brush again and again?

6) Spit

Ah, the sad moment inevitably arrives when you and your beloved toothpaste must part ways. As you eject it from your mouth into the sink, take a moment to reflect on the arc of the stream. Does it curve upward or merely drop straight down into the drain? Do the flavors linger after you've rinsed?

Let's try out our new skills on a few of the leading national brands:

(Note: When conducting a comparative toothpaste tasting it's helpful to have something on hand to cleanse your palate with and prepare your mouth for the next sample. I recommend Oreo cookies.)

CREST REGULAR PASTE

Classic tube with patriotic red, white and blue colors. Paste is pale blue in color with aromas of Band-Aids and my grandmother's medicine cabinet. Smooth texture and chalky, wintergreen flavor with a long finish. Perhaps too long.

TOM'S OF MAINE NATURAL TOOTHPASTE, SILLY STRAWBERRY FLAVOR

Festive tube features colorful pictures of fruit and a toothpaste-toting parrot. Paste is the color of ... paste! Spackle-hued with odd banana scent (odd mainly because it's supposed to smell like strawberries, isn't it?) Looks like a fresh mozzarella ball on the brush. Weak foam with barely detectable flavors of Smarties candy, without the sugar.

COLGATE WINTERFRESH GEL

Sleek red, white and green tube. Ice blue gel looks like it might glow in the dark, but it doesn't. (I tested it.) Subtle Wintergreen Lifesaver aromas greet the nose, followed by healthy foam in the mouth and understated sweetness on the palate.

MENTADENT FRESH MINT FLAVOR WITH BAKING SODA & PEROXIDE

Space-age pump dispenses white baking soda paste from one side and electric blue peroxide gel from the other to "maximize the release of oxygen bubbles as you brush." This stuff not only provides you with much-needed oxygen bubbles, it also gives you a nice workout pushing the pump down. Pleasant Altoid-y scent with silky foam in the mouth and fresh peppermint flavor. Lasting cool sensation!



Now that you're a bonafide toothpaste aficionado, you're probably thinking: "Sure, toothpaste tastes great on its own - but can I use it in my favorite recipes too?" I was thinking the same thing! That's why I called the folks at Colgate for some professional insight. Here's what Lisette, the friendly Colgate Consumer Affairs rep, had to say:

Wine X: Can toothpaste be used as an ingredient in cooking?

Colgate: No. It's not a food-grade item, so we wouldn't include it in cooking. That's why we don't recommend swallowing toothpaste - it's not meant for ingestion.

Wine X: If you cook with toothpaste does that mean you don't have to brush your teeth after you eat?

Colgate: You should always brush your teeth after you eat.

Wine X: If you eat a lot of toothpaste, say on crackers or spread on bagels, will it make you sick?

Colgate: You'll get a stomach ache. That's like eating a whole bar of soap - it would just taste better going down. There's a warning on the tube that says not to swallow the toothpaste. That's because parents were letting their kids suck on the tubes and they were getting sick.

Wine X: Hey... is there any way to get toothpaste out of your shirt after you drool on yourself getting ready for work?

Colgate: We've done studies on that and we found out that most people brush before they get dressed. If you get some on your shirt, the product will stay on the fiber. If you pre-treat it with Clorox 2 immediately, it may go away. If you get a big clump of it on yourself you can freeze the garment and peel the toothpaste off.

Wine X: Thanks, Lisette!

Now you need never take brushing your teeth for granted again. Each new day is another chance to thrill your senses and expand your palate. Whether you're a Crest-loving traditionalist, a Tom's of Maine new-ager or a Close-Up retro-paste hipster, don't be afraid to branch out and experiment with new toothpaste varietals! In this brave new world of paste, there's fun and fluoride for everyone.